Valkyrie might not fly

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LUCAS DURAND

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The underground bunker hummed with the dull sound of machinery, the air thick with the heavy stench of oil and rust. A faint smell of sweat lingered, as though the very walls were soaked in the tension of war. Werner Bauer, senior engineer of the V-2 rocket program, crouched beside the central control panel, his fingers tracing the exposed wiring with a steady hand. Yet, beneath the calm, something gnawed at him. Something was wrong.

His eyes flicked between the intricate system before him and the schematic on the table, his brow furrowed in concentration. The faint scratches on the wire weren't a mistake, they were deliberate, methodical. A subtle tampering, too well hidden to be

an accident, too precise to be anyone but someone who knew what they were doing. It could be the difference between success and disaster.

"Something's wrong," Werner muttered under his breath, his voice barely above a whisper, as if the very air could betray him. His pulse quickened as his hand hovered over the circuit. The Allies were closing in, their bombs falling ever closer to the heart of the Reich. If this rocket, Germany's last hope for retaliation, failed because of sabotage… it would be catastrophic. The thought lingered, heavy and suffocating.

The clock on the wall ticked louder than usual, an unrelenting reminder of time slipping away. Werner wiped his brow with the back of his hand, trying to steady his breathing. His thoughts raced. This mission had been decades in the making, one last chance for Germany to strike back. The V-2 rocket, the crown jewel of Nazi engineering, was the key to turning the tide of the war. And yet, it was now in danger of becoming their undoing.

"Everything all right, Bauer?"

The voice was sharp, interrupting his thoughts. He froze, heart pounding in his chest. It was Kessler, his assistant. A young man, eager, loyal to the Reich. His

sharp eyes locked onto Werner, unaware of the storm brewing in his mind.

Werner stood quickly, trying to hide the sudden tension in his body. He forced a smile, one that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Of course. Just making the final adjustments before the test."

Kessler, not one to linger, nodded briskly. "Good. The launch is scheduled for tomorrow, and the Führer will be pleased." His words were as cold and mechanical as the rockets they were working on, but the pride in his voice was unmistakable. Kessler was just another cog in the machine, certain of victory, certain that the rocket would be the turning point in the war.

Werner didn't respond immediately. He watched as Kessler turned to leave, the sound of his boots echoing against the steel walls. But Werner's gaze didn't follow him. It remained fixed on the exposed wires, the minute but unmistakable marks of tampering. Whoever had done this had known exactly what they were doing.

He was not alone in this bunker. But who? And why?

The walls of the underground facility felt smaller now, the oppressive silence suffocating. The clock ticked on, its rhythmic beat growing louder in his ears. He had to move quickly, but he also had to be careful. If someone in the program was working against them, their plan was far more advanced than he had imagined. And time ...time was running out.

Werner glanced once more at the control panel, his thoughts racing. His heart was heavy, the weight of responsibility pressing down on him. The war was nearly over. The Allies were closing in from all directions. This rocket, the culmination of years of work, was their last chance to strike back, to break the momentum of the advancing forces. If it failed, the consequences would be irreversible.

He swallowed hard, forcing his mind to focus. He didn't have much time. He had to find the mole, uncover the sabotage, and stop it before the launch. But every step forward felt like walking on a razor's edge.

"Bauer!"

Werner spun at the sudden voice, his hand instinctively reaching for the wrench at his side. But it wasn't Kessler this time. It was Schneider, the head of security, his face twisted in a grim expression.

"There's been a problem," Schneider said, his voice tight. "We've discovered discrepancies in the supply records, parts missing, equipment unaccounted for. Someone's been making unauthorized changes to the rocket's design."

Werner's pulse spiked. Could it be? Was Kessler involved? He had to act fast.

"What kind of discrepancies?" Werner asked, his voice low, careful.

"Nothing we can prove yet," Schneider replied, his eyes scanning the room. "But we think someone on the inside is sabotaging the project. We need to find out who."

Werner didn't wait for Schneider to say more. Without a word, he turned and headed toward the command center, his mind already racing ahead. It was too risky to confront Kessler directly; he had to be sure. But the sabotage was real. And the mole, whoever they were, had to be stopped before it was too late.

As he reached the command center, the tension in the air thickened. The launch preparations were in full swing, technicians moving about with an air of

purpose, completely unaware of the treachery festering under their noses. Werner's eyes scanned the room, searching for any sign of Kessler. His assistant was nowhere in sight.

"Werner!"

Werner turned at the sound of his name, his breath catching in his throat. It was Kessler appearing from behind a row of workstations, his face unnervingly calm.

"I need to speak with you," Kessler said, his voice even, but there was something in his eyes that Werner didn't like. It was too calm, too rehearsed.

"Later," Werner said curtly, his hand tightening on the console in front of him. He could feel the weight of the moment bearing down on him. He had no choice but to confront Kessler now.

"You've been tampering with the systems, haven't you?" Werner said, his voice hard and quiet. The words hung in the air like a challenge.

Kessler froze, the briefest flicker of surprise crossing his face before he masked it with a sly smile. "Tampering? That's quite an accusation, Werner."

Werner stepped forward, his eyes narrowing. “I’ve seen the marks. I know what you’ve done. You’ve tried to sabotage this rocket. Why?”

Kessler’s smile faded, and for the first time, there was a coldness in his eyes—coldness that sent a shiver down Werner’s spine. “You still don’t get it, do you? This rocket was never meant to be launched. You think this is about the Reich? About the war? It’s bigger than that, Bauer. Much bigger.”

The door to the command center slammed open, and Schneider appeared, flanked by armed guards. “What’s going on here?” he demanded, his hand on his pistol.

Werner’s heart pounded in his chest. He was standing on the edge, staring into the abyss. “Kessler’s the mole,” Werner said, his voice steady but strained. “He’s the one sabotaging the project.”

Kessler’s eyes flashed, but he didn’t move. The tension in the room was suffocating, but there was no turning back now. Werner had made his choice.

“Is that so?” Schneider’s voice was laced with scepticism. He looked at Kessler, then back at Werner. “Are you sure about this, Bauer?”

For a long moment, Kessler didn't say a word. Then, in one swift motion, he reached into his jacket and pulled out a small detonator. "It's too late for you, Werner," he said, his voice low. "The rocket's already been set to launch. And once it's off, there's no stopping it."

Werner's mind raced. The mole wasn't just sabotaging the project; they had already set the wheels in motion. The launch couldn't be stopped now.

The clock ticked, the final seconds slipping away.

And then, with a deafening roar, the V-2 rocket launched, tearing through the sky with a promise of destruction.

Chapter 1
The silent betrayal

The facility at Peenemünde was unusually still that evening, the usual hum of rockets and industrial machinery replaced by the whisper of wind against the reinforced glass and the muffled sounds of war from a distant world. The Allies were closing in, the bombing raids intensifying, but inside the walls of the secret compound, the work continued relentlessly. Werner Bauer's footsteps echoed down the long, narrow corridor, the sound of his boots against the concrete floor seeming to grow louder with each step. He passed by the guards, who gave him cursory glances, their eyes flickering briefly over his figure before returning to their posts. Werner had earned their trust, after all.

But trust... now that was something Werner wasn't so sure about anymore.

His thoughts were a tangle of suspicion and doubt. There was something off. He could feel it, in the pit of his stomach, a gnawing sense that something wasn't right. Something had been wrong with the V-2 rockets for days. He had been working on them for years, and yet, these last few weeks had felt different. The sabotage he had uncovered had been subtle, too subtle for anyone but an insider to pull off. Someone on the inside was sabotaging the very weapon that was supposed to turn the tide of the war in Germany's favour.

Werner's hand tightened around the strap of his leather satchel as he quickened his pace. His mind raced, but his body moved instinctively, each step taking him closer to the place he needed to be. The laboratory housing the guidance systems for the V-2 rockets was up ahead. The door, heavy and unyielding, loomed at the end of the hall, the dim yellow light from within spilling out beneath it. He had already sent Kessler, his young assistant, on an errand to the main complex. Werner needed a few minutes alone, time to think, to investigate further. He needed to find the mole before it was too late.

As he reached the door, Werner's pulse quickened. He wasn't sure what he expected to find, but he knew he couldn't ignore the gut feeling clawing at him. There was something wrong. The sabotage was more than a careless mistake, it was calculated. Precise. It was meant to fail the mission, to send the rocket careening off course. If it launched, it would miss its intended target, London, and instead crash into German defences, creating chaos at a time when they could least afford it.

He pushed the door open, stepping into the dimly lit laboratory. The low hum of equipment filled the space, but everything felt quieter now, too quiet. Werner moved quickly, his hands steady as he examined the control panels, his mind already knowing what he would find. The wiring, the circuits, they had all been tampered with. Someone had made sure the guidance system would fail at the worst possible moment. Werner felt a cold shiver creep up his spine. Who would do this? Who could do this?

His hands moved over the wiring, tracing the faint scratch marks that had been left on the connections. It wasn't just one mistake, it was a pattern. A deliberate series of alterations that, if left unchecked, would send the V-2 into a random direction. He had to stop

it. They had to fix it, and fast. If they didn't, it would be the end. The Allies were already closing in, and the rocket was their last hope. If it failed, so would Germany.

Werner stepped back from the control panel, his mind working furiously. How could this have happened? Who could be behind this? He had worked with everyone here for years. Trusted them. And yet, someone was betraying them all. He glanced around the lab, half-expecting someone to be standing behind him. But the room was empty, save for the whir of machinery and the faint buzz of a distant conversation in the hallway. He was alone. But for how long?

Then, without warning, the door creaked open behind him. Werner spun around, his heart pounding in his chest. He instinctively reached for the wrench on the workbench, his fingers brushing the cold metal. But it wasn't a threat that greeted him. It was Kessler.

Kessler stood in the doorway, holding a clipboard with an air of indifference. His eyes, those sharp, calculating eyes, met Werner's, and for a moment, Werner felt a chill settle in the pit of his stomach. His assistant's presence here, at this exact moment, felt too coincidental. Too perfect.

"Everything all right, Werner?" Kessler asked, his voice calm, too calm. He took a step into the lab, his eyes sweeping over the control panel with practiced ease, but there was something unsettling about his gaze. The way his lips curved upward, just slightly, in that knowing smile. It wasn't the first time Werner had noticed that smile, it had always seemed a little too rehearsed, a little too eager.

Werner forced a smile of his own, his pulse still racing. He couldn't let on that he suspected anything yet. He had to play it cool. He had to buy himself time. "Yes, just fine," he said, his voice steady, though inside, his mind was already working over the possibilities. "I thought I heard something. Maybe it was just the wind."

Kessler nodded as he placed the clipboard on the table, his eyes still locked on Werner's. "Of course," he said softly. "The wind plays tricks in these old tunnels." He leaned forward, his eyes scanning the control panel, lingering on the wiring that Werner had just examined. "You're sure the rocket's ready for launch? The final test will be the beginning of the end for the Allies. We can't afford any mistakes."

Werner felt the weight of Kessler's words settle heavily on his shoulders. The beginning of the end.

He nodded, though doubt gnawed at him. “I’m sure,” Werner said firmly, even as his mind raced. Was Kessler in on it? Could he be the one behind the sabotage?

Kessler’s smile widened, almost too much, a subtle warning that Werner wasn’t sure how to interpret. “Good,” Kessler said, his voice cold but still too pleasant. “Tomorrow will be the final test. The Führer is expecting results. It’s all in your hands now, Werner.”

As Kessler turned to leave, Werner’s thoughts swirled. Could it really be Kessler? The young assistant who had been so eager to please? He had been trusted, given responsibility. But then again, who else could it be? The sabotage was too clean, too precise. He had to find the mole. He couldn’t afford to trust anyone anymore.

For a moment, Werner stood frozen, his hand still hovering over the control panel. The clock on the wall ticked on, relentless and unforgiving. The rocket’s success was the key to everything. The war, the survival of the Reich. If he failed now, it would all be for nothing.

He turned quickly, scanning the lab one last time. His eyes darted across the papers on the table, the

schematics strewn haphazardly in his wake. He had to act fast. There wasn't much time.

And as he gathered his thoughts, a cold dread began to settle over him. Kessler's face, that smile, too knowing, too calm, haunted him. Was he the one pulling the strings? Or was there someone else?

Werner's gaze fixed on the door. The sabotage had been discovered, but the culprit was still out there. The war was on the brink of changing, and the V-2 rocket was their last hope. But before that final test could launch, Werner Bauer needed to uncover the traitor within, before it was too late.

The wind howled outside, but inside the lab, it was silent, save for the slow, steady ticking of the clock on the wall. The countdown had begun.

Chapter 2
The race against time

The control room buzzed with the low hum of machines, a sound that usually brought a sense of calm to Werner Bauer. Today, however, it felt like the prelude to a storm. He stood in front of the control panel, eyes scanning the glowing screens with precision, but his mind was elsewhere, tangled in suspicion. Every wire, every circuit, every readout felt like it was hiding something. The sabotage was too subtle, too well-planned to be a mistake. It had been deliberate. And the more Werner thought about it, the more certain he became that the traitor was closer than he wanted to believe.

The Allies were pushing forward, bombing raids becoming more frequent, the air in the room thick with the scent of burnt fuel and the distant rumble of airstrikes. But it wasn't the bombs that kept Werner

awake at night. It was the sabotage. The V-2 rocket could change the course of the war. If it launched as planned, it could strike London before the Allies even realized it was coming. But if the guidance system failed, it could miss the target entirely ...no; it could go off-course and wreak havoc on their own forces. The consequences were unimaginable.

"Everything ready for the test?" Kessler's voice broke through the tension, snapping Werner back to the present. The young assistant stepped into the room, clipboard in hand, his eyes gleaming with an unsettling enthusiasm.

Werner didn't answer immediately. His fingers hovered over the control panel, tracing the outlines of the schematics displayed on the screen. His mind was a whirlwind, each thought leading him further down a dark path. He couldn't shake the feeling that Kessler knew more than he was letting on. Was he the one? Or was it someone else? The room felt too small, too confined, as if the walls were closing in on him.

"Werner?" Kessler pressed, his voice now carrying a hint of impatience. "We don't have all day. The Führer will be expecting results."

Werner turned, forcing a tight smile onto his face. “Of course, Kessler. Just... double-checking everything.” His words were measured, careful. He wasn’t about to reveal the doubt gnawing at him. Not yet. “The test will go ahead as scheduled. We’re just... fine-tuning.”

Kessler’s eyes flickered briefly to the control panel, his gaze lingering on the readouts for a split second too long. “Fine-tuning, yes.” He nodded slowly. “I’m sure it will be perfect. After all, we’ve done everything by the book.”

The words hung in the air, weighted with something Werner couldn’t quite place. He glanced at Kessler again, studying the young man’s expression. There was something off about him today, something different in the way he spoke. The casual tone, the faint twitch of his lips. Werner knew better than to ignore his instincts, but he couldn’t yet put his finger on it.

“It feels... too quiet,” Werner said, his voice low as he returned his attention to the control panel. “Like we’re on the edge of something, but we don’t know what it is.”

Kessler raised an eyebrow. “The Allies are clos-

er, yes. But we've prepared for this. We'll hit them first with the rocket. That'll be the end of their little bombing raids." He stepped closer, placing the clipboard on the console, and leaned over to check the status. "The test is tomorrow, Werner. The rocket will be flawless. And you know as well as I do that the Führer doesn't tolerate failure."

Werner gripped the edge of the console, his knuckles white. "Failure," he muttered. "Yes. I'm well aware of that." He let out a slow breath, trying to steady himself. But his mind was spinning. What if Kessler was the one who had altered the guidance system? What if he was the one who had planted the seeds of doubt, set the stage for a failure that would be pinned on Werner himself?

Suddenly, without warning, his instincts snapped into action. He straightened, locking eyes with Kessler. "You've been testing the rockets, haven't you?" His voice was sharp, cutting through the air like a knife. "Tested them repeatedly. You said it yourself."

Kessler's expression faltered for a fraction of a second, but it was enough for Werner to notice. The smile that had lingered on Kessler's lips disappeared, replaced by a cool, almost cold look. "What are you implying?" Kessler asked, his voice low, warning.

Werner's pulse quickened. "I'm implying that someone has sabotaged the rocket. And I think I know who."

The words hung in the air like a challenge, and for a moment, the room seemed to shrink, the tension palpable between them. Kessler's eyes narrowed, and for a heartbeat, Werner thought he saw a flicker of something, anger, fear, or maybe both. It was gone too quickly for him to be sure.

"You're out of line, Werner," Kessler said, his voice icy. "The tests have been conducted properly. There's no sabotage. You're just paranoid. The war is getting to you."

Werner took a step closer, his gaze unflinching. "I know what I'm seeing. I know what I'm hearing. And I'm telling you, Kessler, the guidance system has been altered. Someone is trying to make this rocket fail, and you're involved."

Kessler's smile returned, but this time it was strained, forced. He stepped back, putting distance between them. "You're being irrational, Werner. This is a project for the Reich, for the Führer. There's no room for doubt or suspicion."

Werner stood his ground, refusing to back down. “Then explain the scratches. The marks on the wiring. The deviations in the design. If you can explain that, then maybe I’ll believe you.” His voice dropped lower, deadly calm. “But I don’t think you can. Because I think you’re the one who’s been testing something else. Something much darker.”

For a long moment, neither of them spoke. The sound of distant air raids grew louder, the vibrations in the building intensifying as another wave of bombers flew overhead. The tension in the room was unbearable, and Werner knew that time was running out. He had to act. He had to get answers, and he had to do it quickly.

Finally, Kessler broke the silence. His lips curled into a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “You think I’m the one who’s been sabotaging the rockets?” he asked, voice dripping with mockery. “You’re more paranoid than I thought, Werner.”

But Werner wasn’t fooled. The smile, the eyes, there was something about Kessler’s demeanour that set him on edge. He had to find out for sure. He had no choice. The test would take place tomorrow, and if he couldn’t uncover the mole by then, it might be too late.

Without another word, Werner turned away, his mind racing. He had to get into the system, look deeper into the wiring, the design, and find the flaw before it was too late. The fate of the V-2 rocket, and the future of the war, hung in the balance. And if he couldn't uncover the traitor in time, the sabotage would bring them all down.

Kessler's voice followed him as he moved toward the door. "You're making a mistake, Werner," Kessler called out. "You're letting fear take over."

Werner paused for a moment, the weight of Kessler's words settling on him. But then he turned the handle, pushing the door open. "No, Kessler," he said over his shoulder, his voice filled with cold determination. "I'm not afraid. But I will find the truth."

Chapter 3
The breaking point

The sound of gunfire echoed faintly from the streets of Peenemünde, a distant reminder that the Allies were closer than ever, but Werner Bauer could hardly focus on that. His mind was consumed by the cold realization that something was very wrong with the V-2 program. The sabotage he had uncovered, the tampering with the guidance systems, every second that passed brought him closer to disaster.

He paced restlessly in his room. The shadows danced on the walls, twisted by the flickering light of a single candle. Outside, the air raid sirens howled through the night, a constant reminder of the war's tightening grip on their shoulders. But Werner's thoughts were fixed elsewhere. His stomach churned

with anxiety. The test was hours away. They were set to launch the V-2 rocket, a weapon that could potentially change the course of the war, a weapon that, if sabotaged, could be a death sentence for countless innocent people.

Werner couldn't shake the image of Kessler's cold smile, that moment when he had first suspected the young assistant. Now, Werner knew the truth: Kessler wasn't just an innocent pawn. He was a traitor, a mole who had not only tampered with the rocket but was working with a far more dangerous network than Werner could have ever imagined.

His eyes flickered to the clock on the wall, ticking down the precious moments he had left before the test. Time was slipping away. His pulse quickened. He had to act now. He had to confront Kessler before it was too late.

Slipping his coat on, Werner moved silently through the dimly lit corridors of the facility, the walls oppressive, as though they were closing in on him. The lights overhead flickered sporadically, casting an eerie glow on the concrete floors. The air was thick with tension, he could almost taste it. The lab was deserted, the usual hum of activity replaced by a dead silence that seemed to echo through the halls.

Reaching the door to the main laboratory, Werner hesitated for a brief moment, taking a steadying breath. His fingers grazed the cool metal of the handle. Inside, he knew the V-2 rocket was being prepared for its test launch. Inside, Kessler waited.

Werner opened the door.

The room was dim, lit only by the soft glow of instruments and control panels. The massive V-2 rocket stood in the center of the room, an imposing monument to their work, to their hopes. But it felt like a tomb now. A tomb that was about to be sealed, its fate already written in sabotage.

He stepped inside.

“Werner,” came a voice from the shadows, low and steady, breaking the silence like a knife through the air.

Werner froze. His breath caught in his throat. He knew that voice. It was Kessler, but something about it, something about the way it sounded now, set him on edge. The young assistant stepped forward from the darkness, his face illuminated only by the faint light of a control panel.

"We need to talk," Kessler said, his hands raised in mock surrender.

Werner's heart raced. He didn't trust him; not anymore. "I know what you've done," Werner said, his voice low but steady.

Kessler's lips curled into a faint, almost pitying smile. "You don't understand, Werner," he said, the tone dripping with contempt. "This isn't about sabotage. It's about survival. You think I'm the enemy, but you don't see the bigger picture."

Werner's hand clenched around the nearest wrench on the table, his knuckles white. "Survival? You've turned against your own people, Kessler. You're playing with lives—our lives. You don't just betray the program, you betray everything we've worked for." His voice broke slightly with the weight of the accusation.

Kessler's eyes gleamed, his face hardening. He took a step forward, closing the distance between them. "You still don't get it, do you? The war is lost. The Allies are closing in, and we're being left to burn." His voice lowered, becoming cold, calculating. "The Führer's plan, his vision, it's all falling apart. This

rocket program ...it's our last chance. But we can't afford to let it fail."

Werner's mind reeled. "What are you saying?" he demanded. "You sabotaged the rocket to ensure it fails?"

Kessler's smile deepened, but there was no warmth in it, only cold certainty. "Not at all. I made sure it fails because that's the only way we're going to survive. Do you honestly believe that if we fire this rocket, the Allies won't retaliate? That we'll win this war by launching one rocket? They'll turn the entire country into ashes." He paused, his eyes locking with Werner's. "I did what I had to do. You can't stop what's coming, Werner. This is the only way."

The words hung in the air between them, thick with malice. Werner shook his head, disbelief flooding his chest. "You're a fool. You're willing to let everything we've worked for burn to the ground just to save yourself?" His voice was edged with rage. "You're part of a network, aren't you? A network of traitors. The Allies won't just kill us, they'll kill everyone who gets in their way, and you're leading us straight into their hands."

Kessler's expression faltered for a moment, but then it was gone, replaced by the same cold resolve. He took another step forward, his voice low, threatening. "You don't know who you're dealing with, Werner. There's more at stake here than just the rocket. More than just this war. I have friends, powerful people, who understand the need for survival. They understand what's coming." He locked eyes with Werner. "And you're either with us... or you're in our way."

A long silence passed between them, broken only by the soft hum of machinery. Werner's chest tightened. Kessler wasn't just a mole, he was part of something much larger, something Werner hadn't even begun to grasp. And now, with the sabotage on the brink of success, he realized just how dangerous Kessler was.

Suddenly, Werner lunged, his hand swinging the wrench through the air. Kessler was quicker, sidestepping, but Werner's attack grazed his shoulder, sending him stumbling backward. "You'll pay for this," Werner hissed, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

Kessler regained his footing, a laugh escaping his lips, dark and cold. "You've already lost, Werner. The test is already in motion. You can't stop it."

Werner's mind raced. If he didn't act now, it would be too late. He grabbed the nearest communications device, but before he could make a call, Kessler was on him, shoving him against the control panel. The machinery beeped loudly in protest, but Werner's focus was razor-sharp. With all his strength, he threw Kessler off, sending him crashing to the floor.

But Kessler wasn't done. He scrambled to his feet, drawing a knife from his belt. The cold steel gleamed under the flickering lights. "This ends tonight," he snarled.

Werner's heart pounded in his chest as he backed away, eyes scanning the room for something he could use. He reached for the fire extinguisher mounted on the wall, readying himself. Kessler charged, his eyes wild, but Werner was quicker this time, spraying the foam directly into his face.

Kessler howled, staggering backward, wiping at his eyes in a frenzy. In that split second, Werner saw his chance. He lunged forward, disarming Kessler and knocking him to the ground with a force that echoed through the room.

Kessler gasped for air, his eyes filled with hatred. "You don't understand. You'll all die," he spat. "The rocket will fail, and it's your fault."

Werner stood over him, the fire extinguisher in hand. “No, Kessler. You’ve sealed your fate.”

With one final move, Werner made his decision. He activated the emergency alarm, alerting the others in the facility that the sabotage had been confirmed. Kessler’s betrayal would no longer remain a secret.

As the doors to the lab burst open and security rushed in, Werner looked at the rocket one last time, a quiet resolve settling over him. The test would proceed but now, he knew the truth. The real fight was just beginning.

Chapter 4
The final countdown

The rocket loomed in the distance, its towering frame outlined by the dying light of the late evening sun. The entire facility was a buzz of activity, engineers and soldiers moving with frantic precision, ensuring the final launch preparations were completed. Despite the buzz, the air felt heavy. For Werner Bauer, every breath was a reminder of what was at stake. His eyes remained fixed on the V-2 rocket, the weapon that could either tilt the balance of the war or destroy everything he had worked for.

"I stopped it," Werner whispered, his voice barely audible against the steady hum of the facility. The words tasted bitter on his tongue. He had uncovered the sabotage, disabled the guidance system,

everything should have been over. The rocket was neutralized. The test would fail. The Allies would have one more victory.

But even as he reassured himself, the unease gnawed at him. Something still felt off, like the ground was shifting beneath his feet, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't shake the feeling that the game wasn't over.

The countdown began on the loudspeakers, but Werner wasn't listening. His thoughts raced through everything that had happened, the sabotage, Kessler's betrayal, the knowledge that there was a much larger conspiracy at play. He had done his part to stop it, but could it be enough?

He stood at the edge of the launch pad, watching as the final preparations were made. The thrusters were ready. The rocket would launch in less than an hour, and with it, the lives of thousands, maybe millions, hung in the balance.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw him.

Werner turned sharply, his heart leaping into his throat.

Kessler stood a few meters away, his figure half-concealed by the shadows of the structure. The same calculating gaze, the same cold, almost indifferent look in his eyes. But this time, something was different. This time, Kessler was holding a gun.

The cold barrel of the weapon was aimed straight at Werner.

"You thought you could stop this?" Kessler's voice was calm, almost mocking, as if the stakes of the moment didn't matter at all. "You were just a pawn in a much larger game."

Werner felt the chill of panic crawl up his spine, but he fought to keep his voice steady. "I stopped you," he said, the words coming out more confident than he felt. "The guidance system is disabled. The rocket won't make it to London. Not today."

Kessler's lips curled into a smile, but there was no humour in it. "You're wrong," he said, taking a step forward, closing the gap between them. "I didn't come here for the rocket. I came for you."

Werner's pulse quickened, but he stood his ground. He knew this wasn't just about the V-2 anymore. It never had been. "You've lost," Werner spat, though

the words felt hollow as soon as they left his mouth. "The sabotage failed. The Allies will win, and you'll be forgotten, just another traitor."

But Kessler's eyes flashed with something darker. His fingers tightened around the gun. "You still don't understand, do you?" he hissed. "It's not about winning or losing anymore. It's about survival. You think you've stopped me, but you've only delayed the inevitable."

With a fluid motion, Kessler raised the gun, his eyes never leaving Werner's. "You'll die with it," he said, his voice low, dripping with venom.

The sound of an explosion, violent and deafening, tore through the air. The ground shook beneath Werner's feet, and his ears rang with the force of it. He turned toward the launch pad, his stomach lurching.

The rocket had launched.

The trail of fire streaked into the sky, but it wasn't like he imagined. It wasn't perfect. It wasn't on course. There was something wrong with it, the rocket wavered, its path erratic. The sabotage had worked. But the damage wasn't enough to stop it completely. It was too late. It had already been launched.

Werner's breath caught in his throat. This wasn't supposed to happen.

He turned back to Kessler, but the young man was already moving, his gun trained on him with deadly precision. Before Werner could react, Kessler pulled the trigger.

A shot rang out, the sound of it nearly deafening in the enclosed space. But the shot missed.

A figure stepped from the shadows, his uniform unmistakable, a senior officer from the Reich. The officer raised his own gun, the barrel smoking, and aimed directly at Kessler.

"Drop it," the officer barked, his voice steely and unwavering. "You're done, Kessler."

Kessler's eyes widened in disbelief. He staggered back, his grip loosening on the gun. His face twisted with rage, confusion, and fear. "You, you..." But the words died in his throat as the officer fired again, the bullet tearing through Kessler's chest.

Kessler crumpled to the ground, the gun falling from his hand, his eyes wide and unblinking.

Werner's heart pounded in his chest, but there was no relief. Only dread.

The officer stepped forward, his boots crunching on the gravel. He was a tall, imposing figure, his face set in grim determination. His expression softened for a moment as he looked down at Kessler's lifeless body but it quickly hardened again as he turned to Werner.

"You've done well, Bauer," the officer said, his voice quieter now, though the edge of authority was still present. "But this isn't over yet."

"What are you talking about?" Werner asked, his mind racing. "The sabotage has failed. The rocket is off course. The Allies..."

"It's not just about the rocket, Werner," the officer interrupted, his tone sharp. "It's about what happens next. You may have stopped Kessler but there are others ...people far more dangerous than him. The networks, the spies... they're everywhere."

Werner's heart sank. "You mean there's more?"

The officer nodded. "The sabotage was only a small part of something much larger. A conspiracy within the ranks, aimed at ensuring this rocket succeeds and the war continues. Kessler was only one of many."

A shiver ran down Werner's spine. It wasn't over. It was only beginning.

The sound of the rocket's engine began to fade in the distance as it spiralled off course, its trajectory uncertain, its purpose lost. It was too far gone now to be stopped. And with it, the hope of any swift end to the war seemed to slip further away.

Werner turned back to the officer, his mind a swirl of thoughts. "So what now? What do we do?"

"We do what we must," the officer said, his eyes narrowing. "We prepare for the consequences. The Allies may have won this round, but the war ...this war ...is far from over."

And as the final remnants of the rocket disappeared into the sky, Werner understood. The fight wasn't just for the future of Germany; it was for his very life.

With a heavy heart, Werner followed the officer into the shadows of the night.

The End

Valkyrie might not fly

Lucas Durand

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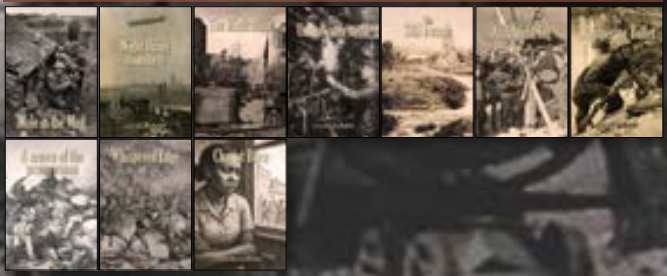
Valkyrie might not fly

Lucas Durand is a history enthusiast whose passion for the past fuels his work as a columnist and author. He delves into the rich tapestry of human events, exploring the triumphs and tragedies that have shaped our world. Lucas concentrates in the WWI era and loves bringing history and events vividly to life.



A faint smell of sweat lingered, as though the very walls were soaked in the tension of war.

LUCAS DURAND